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THE

RESTORATION

OF THE

WORKS OF ART TO ITALY.

THE

RESTORATION

OF THE

WORKS OF ART TO ITALY:

A POEM.

BY A LADY.

Felicia Hemans

AS IF FOR GODS A DWELLING PLACE.

BYRON.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

"THE French, who in every invasion have been the "scourge of Italy, and have rivalled or rather surpassed "the rapacity of the Goths and Vandals, laid their sacri- "legious hands on the unparalleled collection of the "Vatican, tore its Masterpieces from their pedestals, "and dragging them from their temples of marble, "transported them to Paris, and consigned them to the "dull sullen halls, or rather stables, of the *Louvre*. * *

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"But the joy of discovery was short, and the triumph "of taste transitory!"

Eustace's Classical Tour through Italy, vol. ii. p. 60.

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THE

RESTORATION

OF THE

WORKS OF ART TO ITALY.

LAND of departed fame! whose classic plains,
Have proudly echoed to immortal strains;
Whose hallow'd soil hath given the great and brave,
Day-stars of life, a birth-place and a grave;
Home of the Arts! where glory's faded smile,
Sheds ling'ring light o'er many a mould'ring pile;
Proud wreck of vanish'd power, of splendor fled,
Majestic temple of the mighty dead!
Whose grandeur, yet contending with decay,
Gleams thro' the twilight of thy glorious day;

Tho' dimm'd thy brightness, rivetted thy chain,
Yet, fallen Italy! rejoice again!
Lost, lovely realm! once more 'tis thine to gaze,
On the rich relics of sublimer days.

Awake, ye Muses of Etrurian shades,
Or sacred Tivoli's romantic glades;
Wake, ye that slumber in the bowery gloom,
Where the wild ivy shadows Virgil's tomb;
Or ye, whose voice, by Sorga's lonely wave,
Swell'd the deep echoes of the fountain's cave;
Oh! rouse once more the daring soul of song,
Seize with bold hand the harp, forgot so long;
And hail, with wonted pride, those works rever'd,
Hallow'd by time, by absence more endear'd.

Yes! fair creations, to perfection wrought,
Embodied visions of ascending thought!

Forms of sublimity! by genius trac'd,
In tints that vindicate adoring taste;
Whose bright originals, to earth unknown,
Live in the spheres encircling glory's throne;
Models of art, to deathless fame consign'd,
Stamp'd with the high-born majesty of mind;
Yes, matchless works! your presence shall restore
One beam of splendor to your native shore,
And her sad scenes of lost renown illume,
As the bright Sunset gilds some Hero's tomb.

Oh! ne'er, in other climes, tho' many an eye,
Dwelt on your charms in beaming ecstasy;
Ne'er was it yours to bid the soul expand
With thoughts so mighty, dreams so boldly grand,
As in that realm, where each faint breeze's moan,
Seems a low Dirge for glorious ages gone;
Where 'midst the ruin'd shrines of many a vale,
E'en Desolation tells a haughty tale!

Yes! in those scenes, where every ancient stream,
Bids memory kindle o'er some lofty theme;
Where teems the soil with records of renown,
Fame's mouldering trophies, Empire's ravish'd crown,
And the deep tones of Inspiration swell,
From each wild Olive-wood, and Alpine dell;
Where heroes slumber, on their battle plains,
'Midst prostrate altars, and deserted fanes,
And Fancy communes, in each lonely spot,
With shades of those who ne'er shall be forgot;
There was your home, and there your power imprest,
With tenfold awe, the pilgrim's glowing breast;
And, as the wind's deep thrills, and mystic sighs,
Wake the wild harp to loftiest harmonies,
Thus at your influence, starting from repose,
Thought, Feeling, Fancy, into grandeur rose.

Fair Florence! Queen of Arno's lovely vale!
Justice and Truth indignant heard thy tale,

And sternly smil'd, in Retribution's hour,
To wrest thy Treasures from the Spoiler's power.
Too long the spirits of thy noble dead
Mourn'd o'er the domes they rear'd in ages fled.
Those classic scenes their pride so richly grac'd,
Temples of genius, palaces of taste,
Too long, with sad and desolated mien,
Reveal'd where Conquest's lawless track had been;
Reft of each form with brighter life imbued,
Lonely they frown'd, a desert solitude.
Florence! th' Oppressor's noon of pride is o'er,
Rise in thy pomp again, and weep no more!

As one, who, starting at the dawn of day
From dark illusions, phantoms of dismay,
With transport heighten'd by those ills of night,
Hails the rich glories of expanding light;
E'en thus, awak'ning from thy dream of woe,
While Heaven's own hues in native radiance glow,

With warmer ecstasy 'tis thine to trace
Each tint of beauty, and each line of grace;
More bright, more priz'd, more precious, since deplor'd
As lov'd, lost relics, ne'er to be restor'd,
Their grief as hopeless as the tear-drop shed,
By fond affection, bending o'er the dead.

Athens of Italy! once more are thine,
Those matchless gems of Art's exhaustless mine.
For thee, bright Genius darts his living beam,
Warm o'er thy shrines the tints of Glory stream,
And forms august as natives of the sky,
Rise round each fane, in faultless majesty,
So chastely perfect, so serenely grand,
They seem creations of no mortal hand.

Ye, at whose voice, fair Art, with eagle glance,
Burst in full splendor from her deathlike trance;
Whose rallying call bade slumb'ring nations wake,

And daring Intellect his bondage break;
Beneath whose eye the Lords of song arose,
And snatch'd the Tuscan lyre from long repose,
And bade its pealing energies resound,
With power electric, through the realms around;
Oh! high in thought, magnificent in soul!
Born to inspire, enlighten, and control;
Cosmo, Lorenzo! view your reign once more,
The shrine where nations mingle to adore!
Again th' Enthusiast there, with ardent gaze,
Shall hail the mighty of departed days:
Those sovereign spirits, whose commanding mind,
Seems in the marble's breathing mould enshrin'd;
Still, with ascendant power, the world to awe,
Still the deep homage of the heart to draw;
To breathe some spell of holiness around,
Bid all the scene be consecrated ground,
And from the stone, by Inspiration wrought,
Dart the pure lightnings of exalted thought.

There thou, fair offspring of immortal Mind!
Love's radiant goddess, Idol of mankind!
Once the bright object of Devotion's vow,
Shalt claim from taste a kindred worship now.
Oh! who can tell what beams of heavenly light,
Flash'd o'er the sculptor's intellectual sight,
How many a glimpse, reveal'd to him alone,
Made brighter beings, nobler worlds his own;
Ere, like some vision sent the earth to bless,
Burst into life, thy pomp of loveliness!

Young Genius there, while dwells his kindling eye
On forms, instinct with bright divinity;
While new-born powers, dilating in his heart,
Embrace the full magnificence of art;
From scenes, by Raphael's gifted hand array'd,
From dreams of heaven, by Angelo pourtray'd;
From each fair work of Grecian skill sublime,
Seal'd with perfection, 'Sanctified by time;'

Shall catch a kindred glow, and proudly feel
His spirit burn with emulative zeal,
Buoyant with loftier hopes, his soul shall rise,
Imbued at once with nobler energies;
O'er the dim scenes of life undaunted soar,
And worlds of visionary grace explore,
Till his bold hand give glory's day-dreams birth,
And with new wonders charm admiring earth.

Venice exult! and o'er thy moonlight seas,
Swell with gay strains each Adriatic breeze!
What tho' long-fled those years of martial fame,
That shed romantic lustre o'er thy name;
Tho' quenched the spirit of thine ancient race,
And power and freedom scarce have left a trace;
Yet still shall Art her splendors round thee cast,
And gild the wreck of years for ever past.
From thy proud dome again th' unrivalled steed,

Starts to existence, rushes into speed;
Still for Lysippus claims the wreath of fame,
Panting with ardour, vivified with flame.
Again thy fanes may boast a Titian's dyes,
Whose clear, soft brilliance emulates thy skies,
And scenes, that glow in colouring's richest bloom,
With life's warm flush, Palladian halls illume.

And thou, whose Eagle's towering plume unfurl'd,
Once cast its shadow o'er a vassal world,
Eternal city! round whose Curule throne,
The Lords of nations knelt, in ages flown;
Thou, whose Augustan years have left to time,
Immortal records of their glorious prime;
When deathless bards, thine Olive-shades among,
Swell'd the high raptures of heroic song;
Fair, fallen Empress! raise thy languid head,
From the cold altars of th' illustrious dead,

And once again, with fond delight survey,
The proud memorials of thy noblest day.

Bright with stern beauty, breathing wrathful fire,
In all the grandeur of celestial ire,
Once more thine own, th' immortal Archer's form,
Sheds radiance round, with more than Being warm!
Oh! who could view, nor deem that perfect frame,
A living temple of ethereal flame?

And mark yon group, transfix'd with many a throe,
Seal'd with the image of eternal woe:
With fearful truth, terrific power, exprest,
Thy pangs, Laocoon, agonize the breast,
And the stern combat picture to mankind,
Of suffering nature, and enduring mind.
Oh, mighty conflict! tho' his pains intense,
Distend each vein, and dart thro' every sense;

Tho' fix'd on him, his children's suppliant eyes,
Implore the aid avenging Fate denies;
Tho' with the giant-snake in fruitless strife,
Heaves every muscle with convulsive life,
And in each limb Existence writhes, enroll'd
Midst the dread circles of the venom'd fold;
Yet the strong spirit lives—and not a cry,
Shall own the might of Nature's agony!
That furrow'd brow unconquer'd Soul reveals,
That patient eye to angry Heav'n appeals,
That struggling bosom concentrates its breath,
Nor yields one moan to torture or to death!

Sublimest triumph of intrepid Art!
With speechless horror to congeal the heart,
To freeze each pulse, and dart thro' every vein,
Cold thrills of fear, keen sympathies of pain;
Yet teach the spirit how its lofty power,

May brave the pangs of Fate's severest hour!
Turn from such conflicts, and enraptur'd gaze,
On scenes where Painting all her skill displays:
Landscapes, by colouring drest in richer dyes,
More mellow'd sunshine, more unclouded skies;
Or dreams of bliss, to dying Martyrs given,
Descending Seraphs, robed in beams of heaven.

Oh! sovereign Masters of the Pencil's might,
Its depth of Shadow, and its blaze of Light,
Ye, whose bold thought disdaining every bound,
Explor'd the worlds above, below, around,
Children of Italy! who stand alone,
And unapproach'd, midst regions all your own;
What scenes, what beings, blest your gifted sight,
Profoundly grand, unutterably bright!
Triumphant Spirits! your exulting eye,
Could meet the noontide of eternity,

And gaze untired, undaunted, uncontroll'd,
On all that Fancy trembles to behold!

Bright on your view such forms their splendor shed
As burst on Prophet-bards in ages fled:
Forms that to trace, no hand but yours might dare,
Darkly sublime, or exquisitely fair,
These o'er the walls your magic skill array'd
Glow in rich sunshine, gleam thro' melting shade,
Float in light grace, in awful greatness tower,
And breathe and move the records of your power—
Inspir'd of Heaven! what heighten'd pomp ye cast,
O'er all the deathless trophies of the past!
Round many a marble fane and classic dome,
Asserting still the Majesty of Rome;
Round many a work that bids the world believe,
What Grecian Art could image, and achieve;
Again, creative minds! your visions throw,

Life's chasten'd warmth, and Beauty's mellowest glow;
And when the morn's bright beams and mantling dyes,
Pour the rich lustre of Ausonian skies,
Or evening suns illume with purple smile,
The Parian Altar, and the pillar'd aisle,
Then as the full or soften'd radiance falls,
On Angel-groups that hover o'er the walls,
Well may those samples, where your hand has shed
Light o'er the tomb, Existence round the dead,
Seem like some world, so perfect and so fair,
That nought of earth should find admittance there,
Some sphere, where beings to mankind unknown
Dwell in the brightness of their pomp, alone!

. . . .

And lo! thy sons, O Rome! a godlike train,
In imag'd majesty return again!
Bards, Chieftains, Monarchs, tower with mien august,
O'er scenes that shrine their venerable dust. . . .

Those forms, those features, luminous with soul,
Still o'er thy children seem to claim control;
With awful grace arrest the pilgrim's glance,
Bind his rapt soul in elevating trance,
And bid the past, to Fancy's ardent eyes,
From Time's dim sepulchre in glory rise.

Souls of the lofty! whose undying names,
Rouse the young bosom still to noblest aims;
Oh! with your images could fate restore,
Your own high spirit to your sons once more;
Patriots and heroes! could those flames return,
That bade your hearts with Freedom's ardours burn;
Then from the sacred ashes of the first,
Might a new Rome in phœnix-grandeur burst!
With one bright glance dispel th' horizon's gloom,
With one loud call wake Empire from the tomb;
Bind round her brows her own triumphal crown,

Lift her dread Ægis, with majestic frown,
Unchain her Eagle's wing, and guide his flight,
To bathe its plumage in the fount of Light.

THE END.

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